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NGOs in the Operational Theater: What Commanders need to understand and how to work together.

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A paper submitted to the faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Joint Military Operations.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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(14 February 2005)

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Abstract

The United States military will continue to conduct operations in asymmetric conflicts which resemble our latest endeavors in Iraq, Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and Afghanistan, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). These two conflicts will likely be the prototypes for future military operations. Therefore, future commanders will encounter Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) in their Areas of Operations (AO) with increasing regularity.

The Operational Commander and his subordinates must look for ways to improve their inter-actions with these non-state actors to better achieve operational end-states. Commanders must have a better appreciation of what NGOs are and how they operate. In addition, the Commander must balance his primary task of providing security in post-conflict or stability operations and balance that with NGO conduct in the Host Nation. Commanders will find that balancing the task of security and providing for quality of life improvement projects is very challenging. Leadership at the operational and tactical levels will be the critical ingredient for success with the NGO community. This paper examines the problems of fluid security environments in relation to NGOs. It also provides some defined measures that can improve the NGO to commander relationship beyond the present Civil Affairs model. Some of these suggestions are the result of the author's experience as an Observer Controller at the National Training Center, Civilians on the Battlefield integration.

Preface

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Introduction

Conflict for the foreseeable future will resemble the current Iraq (OIF) and

Afghanistan (OEF) paradigms. The days of easy victories and book deals are over. Future

operational and tactical commanders must successfully manage the theater with the

increasing presence and influence of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Therefore,

the Operational Commander must provide security and facilitate quality of life projects in

conjunction with NGOs in innovative and collaborative ways. Cooperative efforts with

NGOs will help the population and relieve the Commander from the greater responsibility of

individual reconstruction projects and allow a greater emphasis on security issues.

NGO Overview

What are NGOs? Why are they out there and in such numbers? What should the

Operational Commander and his/her subordinates understand about NGOs and like

organizations? These questions will be examined in this first section.

A broad definition put forward in 1962 from the U.N. Economic and Social Council

states, "Any international organization which is not established by inter-governmental

agreement shall be considered as a non-governmental organization."[1] A more recent

definition is from the now defunct Coalition Provisional Authority: an NGO is "…any

organization or foundation that is organized to undertake one or more of the following as its

principal activities: humanitarian assistance and relief projects; human rights advocacy and

awareness; community rehabilitation and resettlement; charitable works; educational, health,

and cultural activities; conservation; environmental protection; economic reconstruction and

development; promotion of democratic practices; development of civil society; promotion of

gender equality; or any other non-profit activity that serves the public interest."[2]

Clearly, NGOs address a wide range of activities. NGOs have been around for more than a century but since the end of the Cold War, there has been a dramatic rise in the number of these organizations internationally. This can be in part attributed to the huge amounts of discretionary money available to government, private and philanthropic groups in the last fifteen years. As a result there are now more than 26,000 organizations in existence today, from only 6,000 in 1990.[3]

Many in the military have some preconceived notions about NGOs, viewing them as somewhat naïve but well intentioned people who have little or no appreciation for military matters. This may be true for some individuals, but the NGO community is diverse and many NGO members have been learning lessons by interacting with the US military. Some of the possible types of NGOs that the military may encounter include: relief organizations, government assistance and development, conflict management and mediation, human rights and advocacy groups, international and American NGOs, and ICRC (International Committee of the Red Cross) as a separate entity, but commonly thought of as an NGO.

Commanders are likely to meet relief organizations in just about any end of the continuum of conflict. Examples include CARE (Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere) and Mercy Corps. Relief NGOs specialize in improving local conditional situations. They can focus on short and medium or longer term development projects. For instance, if an emergency required immediate food, water, or medical supplies, these organizations can respond quickly to alleviate the immediate need. In addition, they can focus on developing the capacity of local people of the host nation to support them. An example of this could be a water purification and distribution project for a community.

Other groups concentrate on government assistance and development like judicial reforms and the genesis of such institutions. In addition, there are election-oriented NGOs who help develop and over-watch national elections based on democratic principles. An example of this is the International Foundation of Election Systems (IFES). Many of these organizations have been prominently involved in our most recent military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Some NGOs specifically focus on conflict mediation. These NGOs could help in resolving disputes concerning territories, assets, refugee returns, etc. An example of this type of NGO is the Institute for Multi-Track Diplomacy. Such an NGO could help ease the burden of a local commander in resolving complex disputes between local populations.

Still other NGOs are advocacy organizations. These NGOs focus their efforts on specific environmental concerns or the rights of minority or oppressed groups. An advocacy NGO will generally not administer projects like an aid agency or development NGO. They tend to act as a watch dog for the international scene by publishing reports for the media. Many people in these groups have highly developed professions such as international law, forensic backgrounds, etc. Their typical activities include investigating human rights violations, mass graves for documentation and culpability, excessive use of force, detention procedures, etc and publish their findings. The commander may see groups like Human Rights Watch (HRW), Amnesty International, among others with similar naming conventions. Some in the military community tend to view these NGOs as biased against the military or selectively reporting facts for political agendas, especially if they "shame" the subject with an unflattering report.[4] This usually cannot be proved one way or the other, but

it is worth pointing out that not providing information to these NGOs for their reports will only leave a void for the military side and a one-sided point of view will be published.

NGOs are both national (US) and international. This indicates their place of origin and their main potential sources of funding. They may work together in any conflict or disaster situation throughout the world. Funding for either can come from governmental grants, philanthropic organizations, or through private individual donations small and large. These are collectively known as donors and donors have a lot to say about the genesis, direction, and duration of many projects run by NGOs. USAID (United States Agency for International Development) is an example of a governmental donor.[5]

Another group the military is sure to encounter in conflicts is the ICRC. This organization is oft-times associated as an NGO, however the people who work for the ICRC do not consider themselves as such. The ICRC is mainly composed of Swiss nationals and it is under this banner of a neutral organization with neutral people that the ICRC champions itself as the premier intermediary in conflicts throughout the world. Its main focus is to ensure that belligerent parties and their armed forces are informed of their obligations under international and humanitarian law concerning detainees, prisoners, refugees and the like. The ICRC is not an advocacy group. It works confidentially with government and armed forces leaders to encourage the proper treatment of personnel and the conduct of military operations as viewed under their charter, international law, and the Geneva Conventions. The commander on the ground is obligated to facilitate ICRC access to detention centers and operational areas in an open and unfettered manner.

It is important for the military to understand that NGO personnel have much in common with military personnel in individual motivations and devotion to duty. An NGO

operative is typically a well-educated person with a BA or above and has usually been

selected to work with his/her group while in college. Many will have a particular skill or

profession such as medical, legal, engineer or management to facilitate field programs. They

tend to be idealistic and determined to provide help. In many areas of the world, NGO

personnel will endure numerous dangers and poor living conditions not unlike our deployed

forces (except that they are almost always unarmed). While they are in the field, operatives

have a lot of leeway in implementing programs and providing feedback to their home office

on the progress and direction of relief projects or advocacy investigations. They are

independent thinkers. In most cases, field operatives will be used to dealing direct with host

nation or military leaders.

NGOs will also rely heavily on local hired staffs from the host nation. These

personnel help with local connections, translation issues, and should eventually empower the

local population to run its own affairs. Local hires can be vetted by the NGO or through the

host nation. There is no standard way of doing this and some groups will be more thorough

that others. Military commanders should keep operational security in mind when they deal

with the NGO or their staff on the ground.

NGOs make assessments based on need and come up with an appropriate project to

meet requirements. This could be the training and establishment of a judiciary or a dam and

canal project to facilitate long term agriculture yields. The project then gets resourced (from

their board or equivalent higher headquarters) with money or specialty personnel and

equipment with a timeline for completion. This also implies that a series of measurable

milestones for success be established so that donors can justify continued funding.[6] In fact,

some have written that donor money politics influence the development and direction of

projects.[7] NGO projects aspire to be more attuned to longer term goals that fit local cultural and technological capabilities. In addition, NGOs are very media-savvy and look for opportunities to demonstrate the success of their project which in some cases is the major metric for success and continued donor support. This is a key point when Civil Affairs projects are being nominated in the same area. It is crucial to coordinate these efforts so that the best sustainable solution is reached. The desired end-state for most NGO projects is to help create or develop the capacity of the local host nation population to manage their own governmental and infrastructure capacity.

It is helpful for commanders to understand the ethos that drives NGOs and their worldviews. The basic tenets of NGOs and their operations are:

- The project must address a <u>humane</u> need.

- NGO actions and the execution of projects must be <u>neutral</u> in appearance and deed.

- NGO relations with local parties or between belligerents must be <u>impartial</u>.

- The conduct of NGO operations must be <u>independent</u> (meaning no conditions placed on them by governments or militaries except impending security issues).[8]

- The actions and projects executed by NGOs must be <u>sustainable</u> post project completion by the local population.

These governing principles are generally followed among the NGO community.[9] Commanders must understand that the type of NGO involved and their mission/project will govern the rigidity of adherence.

Other characteristics of NGO operations involve their level of support and staffing. The military is structured with large staff entities to manage the BOS (Battlefield Operating Systems). In contrast, many NGOs, especially grass roots oriented types, tend to have few staff and are most likely to hire local people for administrative requirements. Even larger NGOs like CARE will operate with what the military would recognize as a skeleton staff. A Commander wishing to get in contact with the person in charge of a project may have to wait unless he/she has already established some sort of unofficial and ad hoc system for cooperation (this can be highly successful when established). Not surprisingly, NGOs tend to work largely between dawn and dusk. Military personnel should keep this in mind especially since a majority of NGOs have already been on the ground and will remain in the country long after the military has 'accomplished' its mission. [10]

This leads to a natural inclination among non-government types to view the military with varying degrees of skepticism. Why is this so? The military is an instrument of national policy, in other words it is a side of the conflict. This is why people working in the non-governmental world are so leery of being seen as working too closely together with the military. Indeed some organizations like Medecins sans Frontieres (Doctors Without Borders) are almost puritanical in their adherence to impartiality and thus shun working with military units. Other NGOs, especially those specializing in immediate aid, are more likely to establish a low-level working relationship because they recognize that the military is capable of providing both security and the logistics support needed to make a rapid impact. The recent tsunami crisis in the Indian Ocean provides an excellent example of military heavy lifting capacity making a crucial positive improvement of a dire situation.

As mentioned before, the military generally has a narrow and short-term perspective regarding civil projects. This is usually because the length of deployment is finite and short-term (Iraq and Afghanistan are notable recent exceptions). NGOs, on the other hand tie other intangibles into the equation when crafting and producing projects. Optimally, local people should be involved in developing the project. In addition, locals should be employed in the construction or repair of the target project and it should be sustainable by local means. In most cases, NGOs observe these practices. What good is a water pump which needs particular parts that are not available in the country should a breakdown occur in the future? Military Civil Affairs projects should take care to avoid duplicating efforts that may compete with NGO-sponsored ones. This situation can also occur between different NGOs operating in the same area. It is vital for the Commander to work with both NGOs and other United States Government (USG) agencies to *harmonize* as opposed to attempting to direct efforts in his/her area of operation.

Security in Contested Operations, Iraq and Afghanistan

Let us consider the problem of security in the recent examples of Afghanistan and Iraq. The dramatic difference between these and previous operations with NGOs is the dominance and some might say unilateral nature of the United States' policy through the military in making what is called "regime change". NGOs have recently had to wrestle with need versus impartiality and neutrality issues balanced against a military that is increasingly being tapped to perform nation-building functions after the deposition of the Taliban and Saddam Hussein regimes. Iraq is a particular example where money distribution for aid agencies and its oversight was shifted from the State Department to the Department of Defense (DoD).[11] For many NGOs, this has been a particular point of contention. The

difficulties lie in rule sets that are different than past Humanitarian Assistance or Peace Operations where European or UN backing was present. These issues divide the NGO community. However, many have decided that their mandates require participation and cooperation with the US and Coalition militaries.[12]

The one overarching capability that the military provides and all parties want in a contested area is *security*. The locals need a secure environment to reestablish their lives and aid groups need it to do their business. Given the previous constraints mentioned from the NGO perspective, how can security become established without adversely restraining either the military or civilian aid agencies?

Simply put, commanders have to exercise direct, participatory leadership that stresses the importance of coordinating with civilian groups and USG agencies for security measures. This leadership is what the commander makes of it as described in Joint Doctrine for Civil-Military Operations JP 3-57, (Pg. IV-6 and 7). The reader will notice that "protection" tops the list of military tasks. Indeed, most NGOs would be more comfortable if the military focused its efforts almost entirely in the security arena.

Security is not a monolithic concept. Not unlike levels of force, it must be tailored to the situation and the targeted group (civilian groups and local populations). Security can be either ambient (largely imperceptible to most observers) or overt and obvious.[13] In both cases the Operational Commander and his/her tactical subordinates must work out with interagency organizations and NGOs how this can be accomplished so that disruptions are minimized. Ambient security measures can be indirect observation from checkpoints or patrols that may be operating near NGOs or monitoring from observation posts for suspicious activities. Overt security measures are usually directed by the chain of command or

requested by an aid group. This usually takes the form of a mounted or dismounted escort.

More specific examples will be illustrated later.

In the recent examples of Iraq and Afghanistan the security problem has been keenly felt by the NGO community. The problem in Iraq is neutrality. DoD had been in charge of the reconstruction efforts as was mentioned and this put NGOs operating in the country as almost as *de facto* USG actors. In light of the June 2004 handover from the Coalition Provisional Authority (CPA) to the Iraqi interim government and the conduct of recent elections, this should be less of an issue. However, insurgents have targeted NGO personnel as evidenced by the murder of Margaret Hassan (CARE) in Baghdad and the deaths of 35 reconstruction NGO personnel in Afghanistan since March 2002.[14] NGOs are left with the option of getting their own security either from abroad or locally, or relying more directly on the Coalition. Both options from the impartiality and neutrality perspectives are undesirable. The only other option is to shut down operations and thus place additional reconstruction efforts on the military.

Cooperation between military and civilian agencies, particularly in Iraq, was strained before the commencement of hostilities for the reasons previously mentioned. But more importantly, there is a perception among relief agencies that civil-military humanitarian coordination in Iraq has failed.[15] Critical USG groups and NGOs initially avoided participating in the planning and subsequent tracking of aid projects in Iraq.[16] Debate over why this occurred will no doubt continue in the next few years. Clearly some of this could have been averted by adhering to Presidential Decision Directive 56 or the still unsigned NSPD 1 for establishing means of cooperation and unity of effort between State and DoD. Increasing demands for security against the insurgency has left a void that more DoD forces

and sponsored contractors are filling instead of NGOs. However, NGOs tend to lend more legitimacy to stability efforts than these entities, especially on the international stage. In either case, the operational commander and his/her tactical subordinates must establish a positive working relationship with civilian agencies in their sectors. Failure to do so will only result in more demands on CMO (Civil-Military Operations) for the military to stretch its manpower away from maintaining security.

The NGO community has had problems coexisting with the efforts of the Coalition and US military in Afghanistan. Some of these problems have involved the issue of legitimacy, the practices and composition of PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams), and the inconsistent use of the Civil-Military Operations Center (CMOC).[17]

During a recent conference organized by the United States Institute of Peace in April 2004, an NGO was heard to lament the arrival of the US military in Afghanistan because it turned the Taliban into a pariah organization that has since been targeting their efforts when there was previous mutual acceptance. This can be a profound consequence of "regime change." It is important to point out that although NGOs may not view their efforts as political, the services they provide can serve to stabilize a regime for good or ill.   Those who stick around afterward by default may be thought to be complicit with the new power. Since the election of Hamid Karzai, legitimacy should become less of a problem as more Afghan forces take on the principal security role.

One significant issue of contention has been the Coalition use of PRTs in Afghanistan. There is a plan to eventually place up to 22 PRTs across Afghanistan.[18] These teams have been formed with civilians possessing special skills and various types of military personnel some of which are plainly in uniform and others which are not. The majority of

the teams have been doing humanitarian-style missions in mixed clothing. Most NGOs contend that this has blurred the local population's distinction between NGOs and the PRTs that operate in the same locales. Therefore, all non-Afghans in civilian dress are being perceived as legitimate targets by Taliban holdouts.[19] Commanders should take the time to address the reasons for this practice. If it can be minimized or insulated from areas where NGOs work, this could go a long way in improving cooperative efforts.

In some cases, NGOs have hired armed guards and security advisors/officers to improve their security in Afghanistan. In addition, there seems to be a lack of coordination or effort between these security officials and the CMOC.[20] The CMOC tends to be separate from a military headquarters and this might be the root of some coordination problems. Tactical commanders have a full plate at all times and may not be able to access the CMOC because of distance or some other factors. However, a reliable LNO (Liaison Officer) system with some leadership oversight can help ensure that all echelons of C2 are tracking the same page for coordination with NGOs. There is a general tendency (observed in Combat Training Center, CTC exercises) for commanders to address any and all non-military issues to the CA officer. While this can be effective, it is more efficient if the commander is involved and can provide streaming guidance to meet changing circumstances.

Joint doctrine is vague when discussing NGO-military issues. This is unlikely to change anytime soon. The most reliable method for the operational commander is to exercise direct, early and sustained leadership of operations with NGOs during all phases of an operation, with a view to incrementally transition the effort to NGOs and the Country Team.[21] Optimally, the NGO actors and the Commander should be able to recognize each other and converse on issues without the constant reliance on a CA officer or LNO. The

NGO on the ground or at a staff level will appreciate the personal access more as a part of their culture of independent thinking.

Maximizing security and working relations with NGOs, possible tools for the Commander's kitbag. Recommendations:

- Maximize use of the CMOC. The CMOC appears to be an under-utilized asset. Commanders should frequently coordinate with and support the CMOC. There is not a magic setup for the CMOC. It can vary mission to mission and organization to organization, but the CMOC should be able to answer most questions about the level of military involvement for interested NGO actors in the operational area. NGOs with experience expect to coordinate with a CMOC.

- CMOC oversight and information relevance. For security reasons, the CMOC cannot put out all information involving military operations. The operational commander should regularly visit the CMOC and give the CA personnel latitude to disseminate relevant information on locations and security procedures for military units.[22] The CA Officer should gather all contact information on local NGOs such as ID cards, names, vehicles with identification numbers, etc so that tactical units can recognize NGOs and their activities. This can facilitate NGO operations if local patrols and checkpoints have foreknowledge of NGO activities. NGOs can also understand what their colleague NGOs are doing in local sectors.

- Operational trust. A certain level of trust must be extended by both parties until proven otherwise. Violations of this trust from the military side will

result in NGOs refusing to cooperate and some potential negative public relations. NGOs failing to adhere to their own codes of conduct, especially impartiality, should be noted and passed on to their higher headquarters through both military chains and the Country Team so that possible corrective actions can be taken.

- Conflict resolution and coordination. The CMOC is the one place where sources of conflict between NGOs and the military can be resolved. The conduct of patrols, implementation of military aid projects, and other culturally sensitive issues should be resolved here if not already fixed at the ground level.

- Commander's guidance to tactical subordinates. The commander must establish clear guidance on how he/she sees tactical level subordinates coordinating with NGOs. Operational guidance should include security postures, latitude in accepting or contracting out aid projects, and some format to report the levels of CMO activity in subordinate areas of operation. In addition, this guidance must have clearly articulated priorities for commanders on the ground for tasks and resources.

- Commanders must encourage the establishment of informal ties with NGOs. The local commander that treats an NGO in a frank and constructive manner will likely receive a reciprocal response. NGO field operatives and tactical commanders will find out that they can resolve problems better locally than relying on lengthy hierarchical requests.

- Subordinate units must have integrated CA presence (Unity of Effort). Civil Affairs support (down to Battalion level) may not be possible in all cases. The higher level commander (Brigade and above) should then make sure that each Battalion has a Civil Affairs style team composed of a JAG, Chaplain, logistician, reliable interpreter and a primary action officer who answers direct to the Battalion Commander and reports through the Brigade CA Officer. The main focus of these teams is to coordinate efforts in enhancing security and documenting the needs of local people for possible military or NGO action. In many exercises conducted at the National Training Center (NTC), the CA officer or the designated alternate is not adequately resourced to coordinate CMO efforts at the Brigade level.

- Information sharing versus Information gathering. Operational Commanders can help their situational understanding by emphasizing information sharing versus intelligence gathering.[23] NGOs are very sensitive to any implication that their coordination resembles intelligence reporting. Care should be exercised by military personnel asking general questions about conditions and people as it relates to a humanitarian task. NGOs can give excellent information on cultural aspects of a local area such as customs, marital practices, and available employment. In turn, the military can always provide NGOs security assessments for specific operational areas.

- Checkpoint or third party meeting techniques. NGOs can make use of a checkpoint or patrol as a means to contact higher authorities. NGOs can

have ad hoc meetings with military leaders at checkpoints. Third party

locations can be established. This method may be desirable when the

security situation of an area becomes more uncertain. In this case, careful

arrangements for security levels and interpreter support should be ironed

out ahead of time with a trusted host nation intermediary. Commanders

can meet at the NGOs location if invited.

- <u>Contact methods and procedures</u>. Contact numbers and communication

  procedures are very important between both NGOs and the military.

  NGOs tend to rely a lot on cell phones for the conduct of projects. Should

  an emergency situation arise, the military could readily notify the NGO

  with suggestions on force protection until the situation stabilizes. Patrols

  and checkpoints should have a sort of "amber alert" and reinforce the

  message to other NGO operatives. NGOs can also notify military units

  about credible threats that may emerge from local sources.

Conclusion

We have discussed some of the cultural issues that commander's need to know about

NGOs. It is important to understand some of these characteristics to avoid the classic arch-

typing that normally follow first impressions. In addition, NGO tenets have been explained

as the touchstone for NGO perspectives and modes of operating. Security concerns for

NGOs in light of the recent operations in OIF and OEF and the military were briefly

described with some practical suggestions for improvement. Coordination is especially

important in light of achieving a common effort between groups that cannot directly control

each other.

The bottom line is active and involved leadership between the military and NGOs is crucial and will fall on the Operational Commander to facilitate.[24] The Operational Commander can only make things easier by including the active and legitimacy building effects of NGOs in the Operational Area. The Commander that is not inclined to collaborate because of control issues or distrust of NGOs will make the mission more difficult for all concerned. In the end, a little give and take can improve NGO-military cooperation and thus security and stability of the operation can be better advanced until the end-state is achieved.

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[24] "I have a sense that what we sorely lack are effective means to really communicate with other well in advance of any crisis…You need a mechanism to do that. Right now, within the humanitarian community worldwide, that mechanism does not exist." Mr. Roy Williams, Director, Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, National Defense University Symposium, June 1999. Joint Publication 3-57.1, <u>Civil Affairs Planning and Coordination,</u> pg VII-30.

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